

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 ACDA-07 SAJ-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 SSM-03 /093 W
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R 081156Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2698
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 0094

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LE
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SARKIS -- THE FIRST 100 DAYS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE
COMING YEAR

1. THE BEGINNING OF 1977 HAS A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR
PRESIDENT SARKIS; IT MARKS THE END OF HIS FIRST 100 DAYS IN
OFFICE AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW PHASE IN HIS EFFORTS TO
RESTORE PEACE AND PROSPERITY IN LEBANON.
 2. SARKIS' FIRST DAYS IN OFFICE REVEALED THE TENUOUSNESS OF
HIS POSITION AND WERE A PERIOD OF EMBARRASSMENT AND FRUSTRATION.
BECAUSE OF THE CHAOS IN BEIRUT, HE HAD TO TAKE THE OATH OF
OFFICE ON SEP 23 IN SHTURA, UNDER THE PROTECTION OF SYRIAN
TROOPS. A FEW WEEKS LATER SYRIAN FORCES, WITHOUT HIS
AUTHORIZATION AND APPARENTLY WITHOUT EVEN GIVING HIM ANY
ADVANCE NOTICE, LAUNCHED ATTACKS FIRST IN THE MOUNTAINS
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OF THE HIGH MATN AND THEN FROM JAZZIN TOWARDS SIDON,
EXTENDING THEIR CONTROL OVER LEBANON. SARKIS WAS
REVEALED AS A SPECTATOR, NOT AN ACTOR IN HIS OWN
COUNTRY. YET AS HE LOOKS BACK TODAY ON HIS FIRST 100
DAYS IN OFFICE HE CAN BE REASONABLY SATISFIED WITH WHAT
HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED:

A. AT THE RIYADH AND CAIRO SUMMITS IN MID-OCTOBER, AFTER THE DRAMATIC RECONCILIATION BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA, HE WON THE CONFIDENCE OF THE OTHER ARAB LEADERS, WHO GAVE HIM EXTRAORDINARY POWERS TO ACT ON BEHALF OF ALL ARAB STATES TO END THE CONFLICT IN LEBANON.

B. IN HIS EFFORTS TO LEAD LEBANON OUT OF CHAOS, HE HAS AVOIDED MAKING ANY IRREVOCABLE MISTAKES -- NO MEAN ACCOMPLISHMENT GIVEN THE COMPLEX AND EXTREMELY DELICATE SITUATION HE INHERITED.

C. HE HAS FORMED A NEW CABINET MADE UP OF MEN WHO, LIKE HIMSELF, HAVE MADE THEIR CAREERS OUTSIDE OF POLITICS. ALTHOUGH THE CABINET IS NOT AS INEXPERIENCED POLITICALLY AS IS SOMETIMES IMPLIED (FOUR OF ITS EIGHT MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY SERVED EITHER AS MINISTERS OR DEPUTIES), IT GENERALLY MARKS A NEW DEPARTURE IN LEBANESE POLITICS AND DEMONSTRATES SARKIS' DESIRE TO BREAK AWAY FROM THE OLD POLITICAL NAMES AND FORMULAS.

3. ALTHOUGH SARKIS HAS MADE A GOOD, IF NOT DRAMATIC, BEGINNING, HE HAS NOT YET MADE ANY REAL PROGRESS IN SOLVING THE FOUR MAJOR PROBLEMS FACING LEBANON. THESE ARE:

A. INTERNAL SECURITY: AS SARKIS RECOGNIZED IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS, THIS IS THE KEY PROBLEM: "WE MUST HAVE SECURITY BEFORE BREAD." UNTIL SECURITY IS ESTABLISHED, EFFORTS TO SOLVE OTHER PROBLEMS WILL BE MEANINGLESS. SINCE THE ENTRY OF THE ASF IN MID-NOVEMBER, SARKIS HAS MOVED CAUTIOUSLY TO INSTALL ITS UNITS IN MUCH OF LEBANON. THIS FIRST STEP HAS BEEN GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL, DESPITE SUCH INCIDENTS AS THE EXPLOSION IN EAST CONFIDENTIAL

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BEIRUT ON JAN 3, BUT HE MUST CONTINUE THE PROCESS. HE MUST REORGANIZE AND REARM A LEBANESE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE, TO ACT AS A BUFFER BETWEEN THE LARGELY SYRIAN ASF AND THE LEBANESE POPULATION AND TO PERFORM THE BASIC INTERNAL SECURITY FUNCTIONS THAT THE SYRIAN ASF FORCES ARE NEITHER TRAINED OR CAPABLE OF PERFORMING. HE MUST ALSO FIND A WAY TO BRING UNDER EFFECTIVE CONTROL THE WEAPONS OF THE PALESTINIANS AND THE VARIOUS LEBANESE MILITIAS. AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, HE MUST ANNOUNCE A PROGRAM TO REBUILD THE LEBANESE ARMY AS A FORCE LOYAL TO HIMSELF AS THE CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY, SO THAT HE CAN IMPOSE HIS WILL ON THE LEBANESE BARONS.

B. THE SOUTH: SOUTHERN LEBANON PRESENTS THE MOST DIFFICULT SECURITY PROBLEM. IN THIS AREA, THE LEBANESE WAR CONTINUES IN MICROCOSM. THE PALESTINIANS INSIST THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO AN ARMED PRESENCE IN THIS REGION, UNDER THE AMBIGUOUS 1969 CAIRO ACCORDS AND CONTINUE TO CONCENTRATE THEIR TROOPS THERE. THE CHRISTIANS WHO, WITH ISRAELI HELP, HAD SIGNIFICANTLY STRENGTHENED THEIR POSITIONS WHILE THE PALESTINIANS WERE OCCUPIED ELSEWHERE, ARE

NOW WORRIED AS THEY WATCH THE BALANCE SWINGING AWAY FROM THEM. THE ISRAELI POSITION IS HOSTILE TO THE INSERTION OF ANY PRESENTLY VIABLE FORCE THAT COULD ESTABLISH CONTROL IN THE AREA. SYRIA, WHILE SUGGESTING THAT IT WILL PREVENT THE PALESTINIAN FIGHTING FORCES FROM UNDERTAKING RAIDS ACROSS THE BORDER AGAINST ISRAEL, HAS FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST LEFT THE PROBLEM OF THE PACIFICATION OF THE SOUTH TO SARKIS. HE MUST FIND A WAY TO EXTEND HIS AUTHORITY TO THIS AREA, NOT ONLY TO ESTABLISH HIS POSITION AS PRESIDENT OF ALL OF LEBANON, BUT ALSO TO PREVENT THE CONTINUING CONFLICTS THERE FROM PLUNGING THE ENTIRE COUNTRY BACK IN TO WAR.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 0094

C. RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION: SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN BRINGING EMERGENCY FOOD AND MEDICAL RELIEF TO THOSE MOST SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY THE 18 MONTHS OF CIVIL WAR, BUT THE RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT HAS BARELY BEGUN. SARKIS HAS SENT THE TUEINI MISSION TO THE UNITED STATES, AND HIS GOVERNMENT IS IN CONTACT WITH OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES AS WELL AS EUROPEAN NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SEEKING FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT. SO FAR, THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN GENERALLY POSITIVE BUT NO SPECIFIC PLANS HAVE BEEN APPROVED OR SUMS ALLOCATED. ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT HAS SET UP THREE INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMISSIONS FOR RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION, THE CENTRAL "COUNCIL

FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION" MENTIONED BOTH BY PRESIDENT SARKIS IN HIS NATIONAL DAY ADDRESS AND PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS IN HIS MINISTERIAL STATEMENT, HAS NOT YET BEEN FORMED. PRESIDENT SARKIS AND HIS MINISTERIAL TEAM MUST MOVE AHEAD PROMPTLY TO COORDINATE AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OFFERS OF HELP THEY HAVE

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RECEIVED. LEBANON TODAY CANNOT STAND STILL; IT MUST MOVE FORWARD OR COLLAPSE.

D. POLITICAL RECONCILIATION. THIS IS THE MOST INTRACTABLE PROBLEM THAT SARKIS FACES. THE PAST 18 MONTHS OF SAVAGE CIVIL STRIFE, FOLLOWING 20 YEARS OF GROWING TENSIONS BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON, HAS LEFT THE COUNTRY WITH A BITTER HARVEST OF HATRED AND MISTRUST. IT WILL TAKE YEARS FOR THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES TO BECOME CONVINCED THAT THEY CAN LIVE TOGETHER. IN THE MEANTIME, SARKIS MUST FIND A POLITICAL FORMULA THAT ACCOMMODATES THE BASIC DEMAND OF THE MARONITE COMMUNITY FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT WHILE RETAINING THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF UNITY.

4. SARKIS IS WELL AWARE OF THE NUMEROUS AND DIFFICULT PROBLEMS HE FACES AND APPEARS TO HAVE ADOPTED A PRAGMATIC APPROACH IN TRYING TO MAKE PROGRESS TOWARDS THEIR SOLUTION. HIS TECHNIQUE IS TO ATTACK EACH ONE IN TURN AND, WHEN HE RUNS INTO STRONG OPPOSITION, TO SHIFT HIS EMPHASIS TO ANOTHER RATHER THAN TRYING TO FORCE A SOLUTION AND RISK AN EXPLOSION. THUS, WHEN HE SAW THAT IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO DEPLOY SYRIAN ASF TROOPS AS FAR SOUTH AS TYRE AND NABATIYAH WITHOUT RISKING A VIOLENT ISRAELI REACTION, HE SHIFTED HIS EMPHASIS TO THE COLLECTION OF HEAVY ARMS HELD BY THE VARIOUS FIGHTING GROUPS ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY. WHEN THIS WAS STRONGLY OPPOSED BY THE LOCAL MILITIAS AND THE PALESTINIANS, HE POSTPONED ACTION, SEEKING SUPPORT FOR HIS PLAN FROM THE QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE APPOINTED BY THE CAIRO SUMMIT TO ASSIST HIM. HIS CONSULTATIONS WITH A WIDE SPECTRUM OF LEBANESE POLITICAL LEADERS PRIOR TO THE FORMATION OF THE PRESENT CABINET WERE PROBABLY WINDOW DRESSING, BUT MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN AN EFFORT TO SEE WHETHER THE FORMATION OF A GOVERNMENT OF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION, INCLUDING AT LEAST SOME OF THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL

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LEADERS OR THEIR REPRESENTATIVES, WAS POSSIBLE. HAVING

DECIDED THAT SUCH A MOVE WAS PREMATURE, HE PUT ASIDE THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION, FORMED A CABINET OF MEN WHO ARE NOT TRADITIONAL POLITICAL FIGURES, BUT WHOSE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE SHOULD QUALIFY THEM TO PRESIDE OVER THE RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT. DURING THIS PERIOD, HE SENT FORMER MINISTER GHASSAN TUEINI TO EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES, SEEKING ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS HAS RECENTLY RETURNED FROM TRIPS TO SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, EGYPT, AND LIBYA FOR THE SAME PURPOSE, AND IS SCHEDULED TO DEPART NEXT WEEK (JAN 10) ON A FUND-FINDING MISSION TO THE GULF STATES. IN ADDITION, NUMEROUS MISSIONS FROM VARIOUS FRIENDLY COUNTRIES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE EXPECTED WITHIN THE NEXT 30 DAYS TO EXAMINE WAYS IN WHICH THEY CAN ASSIST LEBANON TO REBUILD ITS SHATTERED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FRAMEWORK.

5. THE SUCCESS OF PRESIDENT SARKIS IS STILL HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON EVENTS OUTSIDE LEBANON. IF THE SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RAPPROCHEMENT COLLAPSES, IF THE ISRAELIS (OR THE SYRIANS) OVERPLAY THEIR HAND IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, OR IF NEGOTIATIONS LOOKING TOWARDS A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM FAIL TO MATERIALIZE, SARKIS' EFFORTS TO REBUILD LEBANON'S SHATTERED ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK ARE LIKELY TO FAIL. THESE ARE POSSIBILITIES OVER WHICH HE HAS LITTLE CONTROL; HE CAN ONLY WATCH AND HOPE. ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT, HOWEVER, THE TIME MAY HAVE COME FOR HIM TO ACT MORE BOLDLY. HIS PRAGMATIC AND CAUTIOUS STYLE WAS AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO LEBANON'S PROBLEMS IN 1976, BUT HE HAS YET TO MAKE A BOLD STROKE AGAINST ANY VESTED INTEREST OF ANY MILITIA GROUP. HE WILL HAVE TO SHOW MORE AGGRESSIVE LEADERSHIP IF HE IS TO CONTINUE TO MAKE PROGRESS IN 1977.

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